Contextualizing Dalit Political Discourse: An Analysis of Theoretical Claims and Contestations in Postmodern Era

Synopsis

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Introduction

"The exercise of power perpetually creates knowledge and, conversely, knowledge constantly induces effects of power."- Foucault (Cited by Goswami, 2014)

Knowledge is the result of human curiosity. It is an account of gathered experiences, perceptions and facts which human encounters time to time. Apart from the reflective function of knowledge, it plays crucial role in the social set up. As Foucault mentions "Truth is linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which extend it" (Foucault,1980). Thus, knowledge is also exercised as power and it has been subjected to domination and manipulation by state machinery, socio -cultural elites as a tool for sustaining domination and privileges. In past decades, the rising Dalit assertion in socio-political landscape of India has signaled rising Dalit consciousness and consolidation wider than ever. This assertion was followed by a discussion over a full-fledged account of knowledge representing Dalit way of knowing and experiencing the world. Dalit theorization is a further step in the lieu of rising Dalit consciousness and assertions, developing the major themes of the Dalit discourse, reflecting over Dalit cognitive styles; by taking Dalit literature, practices and cultural symbols into account. It is also an attempt to offer an alternative perspective to the mainstream perspective dominated by *Dvijas* (twice born castes) hitherto. The exclusive right to produce knowledge was given to Brahmanas who managed to write extensively over social norms, history of origin and rules of administration. They held great deal of respect in traditional societies. They wrote significant texts addressing philosophical, religious and political issues of eternal significance but the mounting orthodoxy made other sections discontented with stagnant social norms. This tendency gave space for different movements and sects. Buddhism, Jainism, Bhakti movements, Lokayats were major forces working against Brahmanical universe. In colonial period, the caste had become a ripe category for revolutions after prolonged exploitation in the name of traditions and scriptures. Figures like Phule, Ambedkar, Faguji Bansode, Tarabai Shinde, Mangoo Ram, Periyar etc. worked on ground to make masses aware of their century's old exploitation. They tried to begin an alternate discourse of freedom i.e., mere political freedom can't serve the purpose, there is a need of freedom from scriptures. This was the time when many Dalits started claiming themselves as the original inhabitants of India and widely used the term 'Adi' (the oldest) before their names. Many Dalit outlets

and movements began such as Adi Dharma Movement of Punjab, Adi Dravida Educational League, Adi Andhra Mahajan Sabha, Self-Respect League etc. (Omvedt, 2011) These movements played pivotal role in spreading Dalit consciousness. All these efforts were proved to be insightful and productive when Dr. Ambedkar began negotiating for Dalits as a separate social group. His works provided base to the future of Dalit assertion and politics in India. He compelled national leaders to address preexisting inequalities within the country. In past decades, there has been considerable discussion over development of Dalit theorization in Indian social sciences. The development of Dalit theorization urges for an egalitarian approach in dealing with Dalit experiences and perspectives. Renowned scholars like Gopal Guru, Aditya Nigam, Kancha Illiah, Sundar Sarukkai, Sharmila Rege, Anand Teltumbde etc. have contributed much in this realm of enquiry and have strongly argued for the Dalit theorization. Throughout these years, the simmering discontent developed its own symbols and meanings. Thus, Dalit theorization is an attempt to look at the world from Dalit perspective. It is an academic enquiry into symbols, traditions and interpretations of Dalits and how it can act as a tool to advance the Dalit cause. It offers a comprehensive framework to all existing themes and forms of Dalit perspectives.

Theoretical Framework

Discourse

The term discourse, in literal sense can be defined as a 'verbal communication' or formal communication in speech or writing. However, the term in specific context suggests the use of language in speech or writing, in producing statements and the ways in which these statements effect our understanding of the world. Celebrated thinker, Michel Foucault in his Archaeology of knowledge (1972), has defined the term in three possible ways (a) "discourse is the general domain of statements (b) discourse is the individualizable group of statements (c) discourse is a regulated practice that accounts for a number of statements" (Quoted by Kumar, 2018). From the above three, Discourse as 'regulated practice' is defined by Foucault as 'unmentioned' structures and rules of society which generate statements and shape our perceiving of the world (Kumar,2018). Thus, according to Foucault, discourse is a very factor in producing intended relations of power. Moreover, the term can be explained in terms of its specific and common usage. In its common usage, the term refers to the ideas and beliefs which are present in the society; for example, the postmodern discourse or tribal discourse. In specific usage, (as used by

discourse analysts or in discourse studies) the term is interplay of language, psychology and interactions in a way that what different language usage creates in social interaction or vice versa (Dijk,1997). In this work, the term discourse is used in its common usage to refer to the core beliefs and ideas of the Dalit politics.

Theory

The term theory is derived from the Greek word 'Theoria', means 'contemplation, speculation'. The term originated in 16th century implying a mental scheme (Nixon,2004). According to Karl Popper "Theories are nets, cast to catch what we call 'the world': to rationalize, to explain, and to master it. We endeavor to make the mesh ever finer and finer" (Quoted by Joas and Knöbl, 2009). Kerlinger and Lee defines theory as "set of interrelated constructs (concepts), definitions, and propositions that present a systematic view of phenomena by specifying relations among variables, with the purpose of explaining and predicting the phenomena" (Quoted by kivunja, 2018). Thus, Theories are systematic explanation of a phenomenon which aim at providing generalized principles to understand a phenomenon, to predict possible relations among variables or to provide justification. In social sciences, a theory is a set of interconnected concepts and propositions that explain or predict how certain phenomenon are related. The process of developing theory is called theorization or theorizing. Theorizing is a process where we systematically organize ideas to develop a theory.

Postmodern Era

The postmodern era refers to the period of 1960s which gave birth to various movements. The term 'Postmodernism' was firstly used by Jean Francois Lyotard in 1979. The term has primarily two connotations firstly, as a time period it refers to mid to late twentieth century period when many movements flourished such as women's liberation movements, Gay rights movements, Black rights movements etc., Secondly, as an approach it refers to critique of modernism and its core concepts such as notion of objective reality, universal application of (any)reason and logic, blind faith in science and technology as tool for human progress, obsession with certainty and belief in grand metanarratives. Instead, postmodern approach firmly believes in skepticism, relativism, subjectivity, situatedness, constructed nature of knowledge most notably. However, in Indian context, the onset of post-modern period refers to the period of 1960s-1970s which is marked by several movements on political and social

front claiming representation and rights in Indian society. This was the period when Dalit movement was taking shape in form of Neo Buddhists movement, Dalit panthers' movement (1972), formation of organizations like Republican Party of India (1957), All India Backward SC, OBC and minority communities Employees Federation (1971) and Bahujan Samaj Party (1984) etc. Thus, the post-modern era created the momentum of identity movements stronger than ever and provided a base for future movements.

Dalit

Generally, the term refers to the people who are kept outside of the *Varnashrama* system and considered untouchables. They are also known as *Achoots, Panchama* (the fifth one) and *Ati-Shudras*. It is derived from an ancient Marathi term which means 'broken to pieces or 'ground' (Malik, 2014). This category has always been subjected to wholistic exclusion that is historically, culturally, politically and economically. The term acquired new implications during freedom struggle such as scheduled castes as used by British government and *Harijans,* popularized by Gandhi. The term scheduled castes appeared in colonial period, implying the castes being listed in the reservation list of Government of India act of 1935 and hence called scheduled castes. In post independent era, the term has gained more revolutionary vigor and political significance. Eleanor Zelliot describes Dalit as "those who have been broken, ground down by those above them in a deliberate and active way" (cited by Malik 2014). Gopal guru has characterized the term Dalit as "subversive, powerful, revolutionary" in its content. Similarly, Gangadhar Pantawane is of the view that "Dalit is not a caste; it's a symbol of change and revolution. It believes in humanism, rejects the existence of God, rebirth, soul, sacred books that teach discrimination, faith in heaven, because these have made him slave. He represents the exploited men in his country" (cited by Malik 2014). Some scholars do not accept the umbrella term for all oppressed sections of the society but Dalit Mahasabha defines the term in wider sense mentioned above. Similarly, the term Dalit Bahujan has been used by Kancha Ilaiah, Dalit panthers, Kanshi Raam to encompass not only Dalits by caste but Dalits in its literal meaning i.e., suppressed in any form. Dalit Panthers extended the scope of the term to the poor landless farmers, labors, women, tribes and all the sections of society who have borne the brunt of injustice and discrimination (Omvedt, 2011). Suratha Kumar Malik defines the unified aspirations of Dalits which binds them as the "quest for equality, self-dignity and eradication of

untouchability. In the name, it bears an epistemological and embodied experiences with a different counter world view and vision to the dominant hegemony and traps the identity as such" (Malik, 2014). Thus, the term has attained wider implications than being confined to the Dalits by caste.

Dalit Discourse and Dalit Theorization

Dalit political discourse refers to the core ideas and themes of Dalit politics as well as Dalit perspectives. In words of Shiv Vishvnathan "It is an emphasis not on voices or borrowed theory but an autonomous language to articulate a dalit view of the world. It is not dalit in the voice of academic sociology, or western categories but it is a dalit world in dalit eye" (Vishvnathan, 2001). It is that background of our knowledge, in light of which we understand reality such as what is caste and how it affects our society? Dalit discourse and Dalit theorization are closely related with each other as Dalit theorization is also concerned with the way Dalits are being understood and the way they should be and how they interpret their world? Dalit theorization is an account of knowledge generated from Dalit symbols and experiences which found a base in post independent era in form of rising Dalit assertion. It is critical perspective to understand the experiences and struggles of marginalized section of society, particularly Dalits. It focuses on the caste as lens to highlight the relations of power and subordination in society. Dalit assertion can be seen as an alternative perspective towards history, culture, modernity, politics and many other major themes of public sphere. It is an attempt to democratize the intellectual spaces and to claim wider intellectual representation. It aims at defining the Dalit self, to know about Dalit way of perceiving world and to understand their knowledge system by closely engaging with their lives. Dalit academia have sought to understand and critique the ways in which caste, class and power intersect in Indian society. Many scholars such as Gopal Guru, Kancha Ilaiah, Anil Teltumbde, Sharmila Rege, Bama etc. have put forth the rationale of Dalit theorization. Most notably, Gopal Guru is of the view that there has been entrenched inegalitarianism in terms of what is knowledge and what does not qualify to be knowledge. He says that the right to theorization has always been prerogative of Brahmanas who have written history from their vantage points and in due course the Shudras have been mere 'empirical' category for the purpose. Thus, structural and socio-historical reasons caused the exclusion of Dalits from this 'Realm of reflectivity'. He emphasizes over the theorization of Dalit knowledge systems as 'inner moral and social necessity' for Dalits (Guru, 2002). Similarly, Kancha Ilaiah also highlights the

fault lines of the mainstream perspectives and peculiarities of the Dalit Bahujan samaj as a whole. Emphasizing over the inevitability of cross-cultural discourse, he says "Now in your own interest and in the interest of this country you must learn to listen and to read what we have to say" (Ilaiah, 2005). Dalit theorization offers an account of these unheard voices and undealt perspectives.

Theoretical Claims and Contestations of Dalit Discourse

Dalit theorization claims of representing all subaltern and exploited sections of society, which have been suppressed by dominant socio-cultural universe. It believes in caste as an analytical category that shapes social and political interactions of people. It locates the truth of Dalits in subjective interpretation of their experiences, necessarily informed by caste equations of society. It explores reality through the lens of caste. One of the key claims of Dalit discourse is acknowledgment of epistemic privilege of *dvijas* in terms of knowledge generation and dissemination which deliberately exclude Dalits from 'realm of reflectivity' for sustaining their social privileges. For Dalit discourse, the denial of epistemic caliber of Dalits to learn and reflect is a structural advantage given to the twice born castes. Hence, Dalit discourse sought to defy the meta narratives of dominant socio-cultural universe for its neglection of Dalit perspectives. It explains Dalit self not as a passive category but powerful and active in its essence. It believes in Dalit self, which is critically conscious of its exploitation and has attained revolutionary vigor. However, these claims are not sacrosanct and have faced challenges such as vagueness of the term Dalit, the inegalitarian attitude of social sciences towards accommodating Dalit perspectives, the loss of oriented politics for Dalit cause, appropriation of Dalit identity by scholars for material purposes, theory versus experience debate, limitations of Dalit perspectives to literary criticisms etc.

Experience as a Framework

Experiences are fundamentally matter of feeling and very crucial for human existence. Experiences have been major source of many post- modern theories such as stand point feminism, orientalism etc. These theories criticized universalist notions of reality and preferred to redefine reality through their perspectives. These theories accept subjectivity as the core of theorization and offers great deal of freedom to interpret world in terms of their personal experiences. Experience as a framework refers to the idea that individual experiences are crucial to understand and interpret the world. This recognizes the role of socio-cultural identities in determining their experiences. With reference to this theoretical

framework, the works like *Jhoothan (1997)* by Om Prakash Valmiki, *Why I am not Hindu (1996)* by Kancha Ilaiah, Baby Kamble's *The Prisons We Broke (2009), Golpitha (1972)* by Namdev Dhasal, *Akkarmashi* (1991) by Sharan Kumar Limbale, Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchables (1935), Karukku (2012) by Bama;* have been memoirs of the Dalit lifestyles and culture. They offer a critical perspective on the caste system and the ways in which it continues to shape the lives of Dalits. These works represent their perspectives, history, struggles, aspirations and claims. Dalit theorization is an advancement of the same theoretical tradition. Kancha Ilaiah also mentions that using experience as framework has been a popular method in social sciences to locate the socio- cultural differences amongst castes. He says "Narratives of the personal experiences are the best contexts in which to compare and contrast these social forms. Personal experiences bring out reality in a striking way" (Ilaiah, 2005). Dalit theorization has been evolving in form of minor uprisings and reactions in form of different sects, concepts emerging time to time in ancient and colonial India such as Phule's concept of Bali Rajya, Periyar's notion of Dravid Rajya, Guru Ravidas' Begumpura, Ambedkar's Samesangha Nirmana etc (Omvedt,2011). These concepts indicate a diverse perspective based on their encounters with uneven society. The most assertive Dalit movement was taken up by Dalit Panthers in 1970s in Maharashtra under the leadership of Baburao Bagul which redefined Dalits as a category having ontological capacity (Malik,2014). Gopal Guru in his writings, elaborates how experience has become a central theme of identity politics. He says "the claims of identity are often rooted in specific experiences. The specificity of experiences seems to demarcate different notions of self and community" (Guru, 2012). Thus, the experiences of Dalits and their autobiographies hold central position in terms of formation of Dalit theorization. The use of personal experiences as a framework allows them to create complex understanding of the world that is grounded in the lived realities of people who have been historically marginalized and oppressed. Thus, Experience as a framework is a powerful tool for understanding the world and it has been particularly significant in the context of Dalit literature by providing a powerful voice to the experiences of Dalits and challenging dominant narratives about caste-based discrimination and oppression.

Statement of the Problem

Representation is the core of political as well as social democracy. Equal representation ascertains social justice as it provides voice to needs of marginalised sections of the society. In India, society being

diverse and multi-layered, there are multiple point of views. Therefore, after independence, India adopted ideal of socio-economic-political justice which established Indian polity as an egalitarian society for all sections. Despite the constitutional safeguards, the socio-cultural hierarchies in form of caste are still strong forces in the society and continue to dominate the social and political positionality of human beings. Dalit assertions are one of the major movements of post independent era, claiming wider representation in Indian socio-political landscape. However, due to the constitutional reforms, their status has improved but over the years, Dalit assertions have not been limited to issues of political representation and moved beyond that. As knowledge plays crucial role in life of human beings, it determines the parameters of just and unjust; building socio-political systems and norms. Dalit assertions also emphasise on exploring 'Dalit self' apart from the safety nets of welfare schemes and provisions, as Dalit panthers' manifesto sought to define Dalit self as a revolutionary self and also identified the foes and friends of Dalit cause; signifying the values underlying Dalit politics as a whole. Gradually, Dalit assertion and claim in politics has raised the issue of theorizing Dalit perspectives. The assertions paved a way to look at caste as an analytical category to explore the social inequalities. Being a very foundation of social set up, discussions over caste have been limited to developmental politics; resulting in theorizing from the above and leaving behind studies over theoretical possibility of Dalit perspectives. The Dalit perspective provides an alternative discourse of rights, politics and Indian society which demands recognition. Dalit political discourse sought to criticise the epistemic imperialism of the dominant Hindu social order which reserved all rights to learn and generate knowledge, to twice born castes. Dalit theorization is a blow to the monopoly of knowledge which kept large section of society aloof from opportunities. Earlier, the trend was to reduce Dalit politics to the economic and political upliftment, which limited Dalit perspectives to the economic and political aspirations with less theoretical and epistemic expedition of its claims. The necessity and demand of Dalit theorization lies in claiming this epistemic and ontological substance of Dalit politics. There have been attempts made by scholars to deal with the theoretical claims of the Dalit discourse but still a consolidated account of Dalit political discourse and its contestations have not surfaced. However, the demand of theorization of Dalit studies has met with several challenges from within and beyond, which also make it inevitable to closely analyse the existing arguments to foster a complete picture of Dalit

perspective. Dalit assertion has been significant chapter of identity politics of India in postmodern era and it still holds central position in Indian politics. To understand the Dalit discourse in its essence, there is a need of contextualizing Dalit discourse with its theoretical claims and contestations.

Literature review:

Review of literature is one of the primary steps of research. It helps in reviewing and analyzing the existing account of knowledge and also in finding research gaps. The following works provided fruitful insights for the study:

1. Ambedkar (1936) in 'Annihilation of Caste' focuses on the firmly built social order through the Hindu scriptures and questions the caste system it portrays. This valiant work, undaunted in creation and flak in consideration discloses the stratified and hierarchical direction that Hindu 'sacred text' provides, which serves as the base of the social living in most circumstances. In this prolific work, Ambedkar has boldly presented certain customs that are prevalent in Hinduism since the beginning, which in reality serves as the loophole in its structure if one views with a rational outlook. Supposedly radical in construction, Ambedkar has prolifically voiced the principal cause behind the complications in the Indian society. In this work, Ambedkar has critically presented how the caste practices have paved their way to the everyday Hindu society from its own scriptures. This brilliant piece of work is a coherent account that cross examines the ordinary, orthodox caste differences in the way of Hindu living. It is a cogent argument in the face of blind practitioners of certain ritualistic ways bestowed upon generations since ages in the Holy Writ of the Hindus and also to the 'higher order' that ignores the challenges that caste system timely poses up to them.
2. Ambedkar (1946) in 'Who were Shudras' discusses the origin and descent of Shudras. He referred to Rig Veda for elaborating the origin of Shudras. He discards Aryan invasion theory and claims that Aryans were native of this land. He makes an argument that Shudras were also Aryans and at a time there were only three castes in society. Shudras belonged to Kshatriya caste originally. Shudras denied Brahmans' spiritual authority and in return, Brahmans stopped performing Upanayana Samskara for them which made it impossible for them to pursue education and own lands. The author has tried to present a very objective account of origins of caste. Apart from this point, he also dealt

with equally controversial debate of Aryan invasion. Thus, the work holds utter significance for dealing with both the perspectives.

3. Valmiki and Mukherjee (1997) in Jhoothan, presents an autobiographical account of his life and persistent struggle against his caste identity. The book delves into the day-to-day exploitation of the Dalits. Dalit Literature has been scarce in terms of accounts of Dalits written by Dalits. Jhoothan by Om Prakash Valmiki acts as distinctive part of Dalit literature. The writer has given detailed and lively account of stories, oppression and discrimination. His first-hand account of Dalit lives provide an insight to life of many other. It is more a memoir that is grounded in the fact that writer belonged to Chuhra community. In words of Valmiki "the pigs wandering in narrow lanes, naked children, dogs, daily fights. This was the environment of my childhood. If the people who call caste system an ideal social arrangement had to live in this environment for a day or two, they would change their mind." The book vehemently criticized the general acceptance of caste hierarchization of society. He also criticized Gandhiji for his dubious role in calling untouchables as children of God at the same time supporting varna system in Indian society. He gives account of differences he himself figured out between lives of Dalits and upper caste Tyagi's of his village. The plight of Chuhra community, their sub-human existence, hunger and starvation has been well encapsulated in this work.
4. Nigam (2000) in his paper 'Secularism, Modernity and Nationalism: Theorization of Dalit Critique', tries to dig out the underlying theme beneath Dalit assertions. He also emphasizes on the category of caste as an analytical category. Caste has been neglected as a significant vantage point to reality and always been treated as a divisive agenda against nationalism. The paper argues for Dalits to rewrite their arguments. This paper highlights Dalit standpoint over modernity, secularism and nationalism. It talks about the way in which the thought and knowledge shape the very possibility of political action which is called 'politics of knowledge'. Author aims at rejecting the entrenched Universalist claim of oneness of identity and cultures and supports the fact that Dalits don't fit into nationalist versus colonialist binaries set up by modernists. They are third category in themselves. Thus, the paper gives a detailed description of Dalit epistemological endeavor and its complications.
5. Guru & Geetha (2000) in "New phase of Dalit Bahujan intellectual activity' argues for the intellectual representation of Dalits and emphasis over the fact that ideological assertion is not sufficient for

emancipation. It requires a developed social theory. It highlights the reasons of failure in developing theory till date. It states that there is lack of critical consciousness firstly and secondly, the Dalit discourse is preoccupied with criticizing the mainstream perspectives rather decoding their symbols and developing them. The paper argues for redefining 'Dalitality' and to closely engage with Dalit cultural symbols and knowledge systems to generate a theoretical account of Dalit theorization.

6. Guru (2002) in 'How egalitarian is the social science in India?' gives a preview of Indian academic practice regarding diverse perspectives. In the paper, Guru highlights the 'inegalitarian' attitude of academia towards knowledge formation. He supports egalitarian practice in social science by which he means that there should not be a universally predetermined nature of knowledge and knowledge formation should be a participatory realm. He denounces the approach that one has innate ability to do theory. He says that egalitarianism provides a 'moral opportunity' to analyze the exclusionary academic practices where some cognitive styles are denigrated to the recycle bins of academic discourse because of their themes and origin. The paper argues that Dalits have always been kept engaged in menial works to resist their intellectual development. Guru says that Dalits have been kept at the peripheries of 'realm of reflectivity'. The socio-cultural hierarchies of still dominates the development of the Dalits. In the final note, he says that developing a theory is social as well as moral necessity of Dalits.
7. Illiah (2005) in 'Why I am not a Hindu' has put forward a new perspective that's often critical and outspoken about imposed mainstream understanding of reality. His book is an attempt to draw a line of distinction between Bahujan samaj and society shaped by socio-cultural practices. Based on empirical accounts, the book stresses on first hand experiences of Dalits juxtaposed to Hindus who have different set of experiences that make them indifferent to practicing discrimination. Illiah in opening chapters has elucidated how he has used the term Dalit and has called for need of discourse based on their experiences to make others know their perspective. The author doesn't shy away to give his own personal account for that matter. Illiah has shared his own childhood experiences to prove his claim that how he's not a Hindu. The book presents a fine account of cultural and empirical differences between Hindus and Dalits. He has criticized the Brahminical domination. He explained how the repetitive performance of traditions and customs has trained generations of practicing

casteism both covert and overt. The book explains how production processes, institution of marriage and concept of death and even cooking practices both reinforces and reflects these distinctions. The book throws enough light on emergence and consolidation of hierarchical power relations where Dalit Bahujan samaj given their socio economic and political status has always been at the lowest place. Through his book, Illiah has made a strong case for making 'Un-Hindu Indian' to defeat what he has termed 'spiritual fascism' and 'intellectual untouchability'. He then suggested the transformative process of 'Dalitization' instead of 'Hinduisation' reinforcing the core idea of the book once again that, the lifeworld of Dalit Bahujans of India has hardly anything in common with Hindu Brahminism. The book thus presents an always existent yet unheard voice of Dalit samaj.

8. Guru (2009) in 'Humiliation: claims and context' provides a comprehensive and detailed account of 'humiliation'. This work is a highly systematic outcome of solid, complex, interdisciplinary pattern of research composition. It encodes the various dimensions and structures that describes mortification and ignominy. The author had tried to examine the socio-cultural composition of 'humiliation' that different cultures cater, as this book prolifically provides narrative in form of a comparative interpretation. This approach is not ordinary which takes the book away from being an 'easy read'. It is an excellent work with examining various concepts of chagrin, abhorrence, prejudices and discrimination. In this book, the author has dynamically approached to the innumerable linguistic interpretations of 'humiliation'. This book throws light on the deep-rooted caste based, gender based, racial humiliation in the Indian society. As the book encircles the 'various forms' of humiliation, it makes it a spectacular display of literature.
9. Raju (2010) in his paper 'Problematizing Lived Dalit Experience' addresses the issue of suppressed Dalit voice in Indian social sciences by taking inspiration from Guru and Sarukkai's paper "How egalitarian Indian social sciences are?". Author is of the view that Dalit perspectives have been undermined by the Indian social scientists themselves to retain the academic supremacy. Author argues for closer scrutiny of this trend. The paper explores the historical roots of the theoretical tradition of Indian social sciences. There is an interesting debate over whether Dalits should leave the poems as form of critique or start doing theories. He criticizes the western social sciences which problematizes the natural experiences and hence it keeps theoretical arguments above poetry which

is highly subjective based upon personal experiences. This is the serious limitation on the expression. Lastly, he prefers to put Dalits before the social theory norms of Indian social sciences and to make changes in what is preferred in Indian social sciences. He concludes by suggesting that in addition to the lived experiences, Dalit memory should also be taken as source of theory. Thus, in Indian social sciences the notion of memory should also be considered as valid ground for theory.

10. Omvedt (2011) in 'Understanding Caste: From Buddha to Ambedkar and beyond' delves into caste and anti – caste movements. Caste system has plagued the Indian society since ages. The book elucidates the various sects which emerged in opposition to the Brahmanical rigidity. She has defined at length the possible connotations of Hinduism and its dominance. The book gradually deals with the rise of Dalit assertion and identity and follows it till the modern times. The work mentions all the struggles and leaders of the case and anti-caste movements ranging from Dravid identity to subaltern category. Omvedt has mentioned Phule, Tukaram, Kabir, Buddha, Ambedkar, Dhasal in development of anti-caste struggle. The book presents an all-encompassing view of the development of caste and anti-caste movements in Indian society.
11. Guru (2017) in his paper 'The politics of naming' elaborated the categorization and labelling of Dalit terminology. He says that "their labelling (naming) change meaning, connotation and significance over time and over space, depending on the politics of the users who create these categories. Thus, in politics the terms carry positive or negative agenda and here the labelling or usage of the word becomes crucial. According to Guru, the categories are consciously created, aim oriented and active. Dalits are suppressed and exploited group in various social formations and it has been much contested. The articles provide profound understanding of the term Dalit and its varied usage such as Harijan, Buddhists, Bahujan etc. The author has taken into account the challenges faced by Dalit discourse and its opposition from within the community such as the middle-class Dalits criticize the term as a baggage from the past and having social reactionary agenda. The author has provided a trajectory of the term and its various dimensions and concluded that Dalit is an authentic category 'confronting various structures of domination'.
12. Guru and Sarukkai (2012) in 'The cracked mirrors: The Indian debate on Theory and Experience' enclose the debate over 'who has right to theorize' in a dialogue form. It is remarkable work for

understanding the relation between experience and theory. The argument that only subalterns have right to theorize over their culture because they are the subject or situated knowers, is represented by Gopal Guru and Sundar Sarukkai argues that people outside the community can also represent their cause and has right to theorize. It examines the ontological and epistemological nature of experience itself and the politics and theory of experience in India. The authors invoke the image of a cracked mirror to suggest a more complex and distorted relation between experience and theory.

13. Satyanarayana (2013) in his article "Experience and Dalit Theory" highlights the existing contradictions of theorization and experiences and tries to deal with it with reference to Dalit theory. He takes into account the theory versus experience debate of Guru and Sarukkai and analyzes the rationale of Dalit theorization. He tries to connect the ethical and theoretical rationale (Guru's position) of Dalit theorization with the political (Sarukkai's position) because it is more concerned with the external value of the Dalit theorization and its encounters with widespread academic elitism of social theorization in India. He emphasizes on the development of alternative perspectives to liberalize the academia and for social transformation. He has examined the significance of bringing Dalit experience into the public debate with reference to the practice of social sciences in particular and social theory in general.
14. Muthukkaruppan (2014) in the paper "Dalit: the making of a political subject" describes the origin of the untouchable concept and the explanation behind the usage of the term 'broken men' by Ambedkar. He elaborates the terms associated with Dalit identity and their meanings in the historical contexts such as *Harijans, Panchma, Avarna,* scheduled castes, depressed classes etc. He further takes on the term Dalit in present context and says that in post independent era the term has gained political 'self-designation' which can be decoded as Dalits being in process of becoming a political subject. Further, he takes one by one the popular conceptions about Dalit and Dalit identity such as Gandhi's concept of Harijans, Ambedkar's depressed classes, Dalit panthers' Bahujan, Gowthaman's Dalit-Bahujan culture, Kancha Ilaiah's Dalit Bahujan etc. The paper highlights a very interesting debate of identification of Dalit subject as a 'Part- Apart' or as a Part of caste. Author concludes by saying "If one were to conceive an idea of Dalit beyond these two political currents, it

would need to be beyond identification, a process of dis-identification whereby the political subject withdraws from belonging to any part and becomes a part of no part."

15. Malik (2014) in his paper 'Dalit identity: The Hermeneutical Understanding and an Epistemological Alternative Worldview' has elaborated the possible definitions and extents of the term 'Dalit'. He describes Dalit as an 'internally positive term' and as broken or deliberately grounded down people. He says that Dalit cannot be seen as a single unified category and mentions that the term has been dynamic in Indian political discourse. He has traced the origin of the term to Phule which was later on taken by Ambedkar and Dalit panthers' movement. Dalit panthers have widened the implications of the term to the all-subaltern categories where they claim that all the exploited ones have same plight. Malik views the term having epistemological and ontological capacity of its own and emphasizes on the existence of an 'alternative epistemological worldview'. He concludes with the remarks that however diverse the category might be they all have common concerns that is call for "self-identity, self-respect and freedom".
16. Teltumbde (2016) in 'Dalits: Past, Present and Future' discusses the past, present and future of the Dalit community in India. It discloses the genesis of Dalits and their present predicament and also the expected future that their current state manifests. This is an extensive work on the Dalits, laid through comprehensive and cautious research from the pre-Ambedkar times to the post. In this eminent work, Teltumbde provides the account of living and suffering of the Dalits in India on multiple occasions. It gives a prominent description on the Dalit section of the Indian population since the beginning and unveils the alleged truths about the Dalits and displaces the falsehood these myths carry. This venerable account also tackles with remarkable developments that originated from Ambedkar's efforts. It includes riveting analysis of 'Dalit capitalism' and Dalit political strength in form of Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP). It deliberately illustrates the ongoing Dalit participation in the administrative, social and other spheres of everyday functioning of the state. It cautiously attempts to give voice to the colonial Dalit(ism) as well.
17. Arya (2017) in his paper 'Theorization of Dalit: Indian social sciences and challenge of epistemic innovations' claims that power-knowledge relationship is an established norm of human society. Such monopolistic hold of power has been established practice that has breed discrimination,

inequalities and resultant exploitation of downtrodden. The same case has been highlighted in the paper that is centered around highlighting this void born out of epistemic monopoly and hierarchized knowledge. Focusing on case of Dalits and Brahminism the paper confirms the need of distinct Dalit discourse that is mandatory for inclusive theorization of society and its issues. Initially, the paper describes the terms like the untouchables, Dalits, Achoots etc. Taking arguments from Gopal Guru, the paper poses a question of how egalitarian social science in India is? Does Dalit perspective find a voice in its framework and whether Dalits have been given freedom to articulate their experiences into an account of knowledge? Admitting the atrocities inflicted by Brahmin dominated Indian society on Dalits, the paper talks about politics of knowledge that's more concurrent and which has bearing on new generation Dalits as well. Highlighting the elitist theoretical terrain in social sciences, the paper calls upon the idea of Bell hooks that says that a view from margins of society gives clearer picture than the view from its center. Dalits have always been at the periphery of Indian social structure that adds a distinct sight and prospective of societal issues and conditions. This can enable a new interpretation and insights to social sciences as a whole. Hence, this paper seeks to include Dalits in knowledge formation and make a case for mainstreaming the Dalit theoretical experiences.

18. Teltumbde (2018) in his 'Republic of Caste: Thinking Equality in the Time of Neoliberal Hindutva' rhetorically explores the evolution within the socio – political Indian society in the post-independent era. In this book, the author has taken the narrative across multiple main screen events in the socio – political domain. The author has touched (as well as rebuked) the Constitutional framing of India and examined the Green Revolution, the recovery of OBC section of the population, the framing of regional political groups at length. Teltumbde has valiantly connected the broad timeline of these events and disclosed the impact of the subdued group — the Dalit community. This work, undaunted in structure, also engrosses the element of 'rising Hindutva'. This book exposes the exploitative nature of the Indian political and social living — the strict abidance on casteism practices and beliefs. Moreover, the book also provides a cumulative account of present-day Indian politics and its ways of dealing with the aged obstacles of discrimination in the Indian society.
19. Prameela (2018) in her article "Who Writes and Who Translates: Dalit Theorization in Writing and Rewriting" raises the issue of first-hand writer of the experience and mere writing and rewriting

perspective towards Dalit academia. She is of the view that the practice of writing about any community does not necessarily a sensitized writing. In that case, one can't claim a true representation of that community. Hence, she advances the insider and outsider debate of writing over the issues of Dalit. This article interlinks these concerns and the rationale of Dalit theorization.

20. Yengde (2019) in his book 'Caste Matters' throws light on the deep-rooted beliefs that run parallel with the reality of the Dalits. The prime content being gathered from the author's own personal encounters adds authenticity and valor to the narrative. This book remarkably unfolds the coating that has kept the Dalit community and its various sub-divisions oppressed since ages. The author has presented the subject in an intriguing manner as the plot touches various elements viz. traditional and philosophical. Yengde, has reflected upon the disparity that continues between the Dalits and the Brahmins even in the contemporary times. He has rigorously contended the discrepancy between the Dalits and the Brahmins and opposed the prerogative entitlement that Brahminism claims. The author has vividly described how "Caste Matters" in all spheres — social, political, economic, cultural, judicial, especially when one is a Dalit in the structure that works smoothly for others.
21. Todariya (2021) in his paper 'Theory and the Possibility of 'Dalit Studies ' delves into the possibilities and denialism surrounding Dalit theorization. The author argues that there has been a tendency of reducing the Dalit discourse to identity politics only. This fact poses serious limitations to the Dalit theorization. He takes Ankit Kawade's paper as a base and argues that society has been inclusive in an exclusive manner. The article raises the concern for lived experiences as mentioned by Gopal Guru. He even quotes Hannah Arendt for preferring experiences in theorization because in absence of it facilitates the judgement without which we would "lapse into thoughtlessness". He concludes by suggesting that intellectual spaces should be welcoming for Dalits to pursue their theoretical aspiration.
22. Wankhede (2022) in his paper 'OTT Platforms and the New Dalit Characters in Indian Cinema' has beautifully mentioned the cinematic shift in portrayal of Dalit leaders and characters. This article talks about the liberalization of the Indian cinema where over the top (OTT) platforms are more popular than the mainstream cinema. These OTT platforms have raised significant and grounded concerns of society and calls for socio-political transformation. In recent times, Patal Lok (2020),

Panchayat (2020), Sacred Games (2018) have done commendable contribution in bridging the gaps of reality and idealism. The shift has enabled many creative and distinct directors to put forth critiques form diverse perspectives of society. Author highlights the various characters belonging to subaltern categories to point out the fact that these new characters are actually the new narratives, coming to the center of the cinema. He mentions the new series Maharani (2021), in which there is a story of Dalit woman leader struggling with sexism and casteism altogether. The paper establishes remarkable analysis of content of Indian cinema and Dalit representation.

23. Kawade (2019) in his article 'The impossibilities of Dalit studies' discuss the partial presence and acceptance of Dalit studies in Indian higher education. He is of the view that the Indian higher education has accepted the presence of Dalit studies but unable to acknowledge its historical roots and perspectives. The author criticizes those academic practices where Dalits have not been excluded outrightly but treated as empirical subjects of researches and Dalit point of views are ignored by the researchers. Thus, author highlights the academic isolation and negation present in Indian social sciences regarding Dalit scholarship. The author raises concerns over the future of Dalit studies by citing Saitya Brata Das' idea of "double-bind" faced by Dalit scholars where they can either survive in limited sphere of Dalit studies or to face mainstream academic exclusion.

Significance of the study

In a diverse polity, formation of knowledge should be a participative realm for ascertaining equal intellectual representation in all spheres of life. The rising Dalit assertion is not only an event of claiming socio-political equality but also to challenge the 'epistemic imperialism' as knowledge production and dissemination is closely associated with structural domination. To expand our understanding of the society it is cardinal to take note of these various themes and values which Dalit assertions have claimed and demanded over time. The study is significant in terms of studying these assertions as a part of a larger epistemic goal in form of developing Dalit theorization; pursuing the development of Dalit discourse with its basic assumptions and arguments over major socio-political issues; highlighting the rationale of Dalit theorization in Dalit discourse; studying the ongoing debates around Dalit discourse. It also addresses how theorization as a tool might give a direction to their wider goals by examining the claims, obstacles and necessity of restructuring the Dalit discourse. The work provides a comprehensive

picture of Dalit politics and its challenges, through understanding theoretical basis of Dalit political discourse. The work would contribute to the advancement of Dalit studies by providing an insight to future researchers, social scientists and policy makers. The significance of the study lies in deepening our understanding of the Dalit political discourse and bringing the arguments of marginalized sections to the core of academic discourse.

Objectives:

1. To trace the development of Dalit discourse.
2. To find out the basic assumptions of Dalit discourse.
3. To study the significance of Dalit theorization for Dalit cause.
4. To identify the challenges in theorizing Dalit discourse.
5. To analyze Dalit discourse in light of claims and contestations.

Research Questions

1. How Dalit discourse developed?
2. What are the basic assumptions of Dalit discourse?
3. What is the significance of Dalit theorization for Dalit cause?
4. What are the challenges in theorizing Dalit discourse?
5. How claims and challenges influence Dalit discourse?

Research Methodology

The research will be conducted using qualitative method.

Research design: Descriptive

Data collection: Data will be collected using both primary and secondary sources.

- The primary sources of data will be interviews and discussions with scholars, researchers, domain experts and activists as well as governmental reports.
- The secondary sources of data will include journals, books, published and unpublished research works newspapers, documentaries and e- resources.

Tentative Chapterization

1. Introduction

   1.1 Dalit discourse: An overview

1.2 Definition of key terms

2. Development of Dalit discourse

2.1 Historical background of Dalit movements and struggles

2.2 The development of Dalit discourse in postmodern era

3. Dalit theorization in Dalit discourse: Core Assumptions

3.1 key assumptions and perspectives in Dalit theorization

3.2 Ongoing debate and contestations within Dalit theorization

4. Dalit theorization: Key Challenges

4.1 Challenges in theorizing Dalit discourse

5. Significance of Dalit theorization in Dalit discourse

6. Conclusion and findings

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